



U.S. Department of Justice

United States Attorney
Western District of New York

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PRESS RELEASE

April 15, 2005

OWNER OF FISH STORE ARRESTED AND APPROXIMATELY \$400,000 SEIZED BY THE GOVERNMENT

RE: UNITED STATES v. AERA LEE

United States Attorney Michael A. Battle announced that yesterday Aera Lee, age 58, of 9 Forrest Knoll in Pittsford, New York, was arrested and charged with food stamp fraud, in violation of 7 U.S.C. §2024(b), which carries a maximum sentence of 20 years imprisonment, a \$250,000 fine, or both, and with conspiracy to commit food stamp fraud in violation of 18 U.S.C. §371, which carries a maximum sentence of 5 years imprisonment, a \$250,000 fine, or both,

Assistant U.S. Attorney Richard A. Resnick, who is handling the case, stated that Lee was the owner of Ocean World Seafood at 841 North Clinton Avenue, Rochester, New York. Lee has been charged with fraudulently acquiring and possessing food stamp benefits issued by the United States Department of Agriculture during March 2004 through April 2005.

Food stamp benefits were issued by the Food and Nutrition Service of the United States Department of Agriculture through New York State social service agencies to eligible beneficiaries. The eligible beneficiaries were required to purchase eligible food items with the food stamp benefits. Lee, however, purchased the food stamp benefits for less than their full value for cash from the beneficiaries. She did this by swiping the food stamp access device cards through the electronic funds transfer terminal installed at Ocean World Seafood.

The government alleges that the amount of food stamp benefits that Lee fraudulently acquired and possessed during this one year period in time was more than \$1,000,000, when a comparable size store not participating in food stamp fraud would have acquired and possessed approximately \$30,000 in food stamp benefits during this one year period of time.

In addition to Lee's arrest, the government seized approximately \$400,000, which the government alleges represents proceeds from the fraudulent food stamp transactions.

It should be noted that the fact that a defendant has been charged with a crime . . . is merely an accusation and the defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.

The investigation is being conducted by the Internal Revenue Service under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Anne Marie Coons, Criminal Investigation Division, and the Department of Agriculture, Office of Inspector General under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Brian L. Haaser.

Lee is scheduled to be back in Court on April 27, 2005 at 9:00 a.m. in front of the Honorable Marian W. Payson, United States Magistrate Judge.

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